

SOMERVILLE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION DESIGN GUIDELINES

I. GENERAL APPROACH

The primary purpose of Somerville's Preservation Ordinance is to encourage preservation and high design standards in Somerville's Historic Districts, in order to safeguard the City's architectural heritage. The following guidelines have been developed to ensure that rehabilitation efforts, alterations, and new construction all respect the design fabric of the districts and do not adversely effect their present architectural integrity.

- A. The design approach to each property should begin with the premise that the features of historic and architectural significance described in the Study Committee report must be preserved. In general, this tends to minimize the exterior alterations that will be allowed.
- B. Changes and additions to the property and its environment that have taken place over the course of time are evidence of the history of the property and the neighborhood. These changes to the property may have developed significance in their own right, and this significance should be recognized and respected (LATER IMPORTANT FEATURES will be the term used hereafter to convey this concept).
- C. Whenever possible, deteriorated material or architectural features should be repaired rather than replaced or removed.
- D. When replacement of architectural features is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence of the original or later important features.
- E. Whenever possible, new materials should match the material being replaced with respect to their physical properties, design, color, texture and other visual qualities. The use of imitation replacement materials is discouraged.
- F. The Commission will give design review priority to those portions of the property which are visible from public ways or those portions which it can be reasonably inferred may be visible in the future.

II. SPECIFIC GUIDELINES

A. Exterior Walls

- 1. Wood Siding: clapboards, shingles, board and batten, etc.
 - a. Retain and repair original or later important material whenever possible.
 - b. Retain and repair, when necessary, replace deteriorated material which matches as closely as possible.
 - c. Invest in quality paint and proper preparation.
 - d. Synthetic siding (aluminum, vinyl, artificial stone or brick) is prohibited because it severely compromises the appearance and integrity of old buildings. In those rare instances where, for reasons of hardship, synthetic siding is approved, the new siding must reproduce the dimensions of the original, including its relationship to corner boards,

window trim and other architectural details, all of which must be retained. The application for a Certificate of Hardship must include precise installation specifications supplied by an expert.

2. Masonry

- a. Wherever possible, original masonry and mortar should be retained.
- b. Original mortar should be duplicated in composition, color, texture, joint size, joint profile and method of application.
- c. Deteriorated masonry should be repaired and replaced with material which matches as closely as possible the original.
- d. When masonry is cleaned, only the gentlest methods should be used. Sandblasting is not permitted because of its environmental impact, and because it changes the visual quality of the masonry and accelerates deterioration. Test patches should always be carried out well in advance of cleaning (including, if possible, exposure to all seasons.)
- e. Because the application of waterproofing or water repellant coatings can accelerate the deterioration of masonry, it should be done only to solve a specific, small-scale problem.
- f. Painting masonry surfaces will be considered only when there is documentary evidence that this treatment was used at some point in the history of the property.

B. Roofs

1. Preserve the integrity of the original or later important roof shape.
2. Retain the original roof covering whenever possible. If the property has a slate roof, conserve the roof slates. Slate is a near-permanent roofing material, and deterioration is generally caused by rusted roofing nails.
3. Whenever possible, replace deteriorated roof covering with material that matches the old in composition, color, size, shape, texture and installation detail.
4. Preserve the architectural features that give the roof its distinctive character, such as cornices, gutters, iron filigree, cupolas, dormers and brackets. Downspouts should be inconspicuously located and should be painted to match the color of the siding.
5. New dormers will be permitted if they are related to the forms, proportions, size and arrangement of existing windows, and constructed in matching materials and colors. If possible, new dormers should be confined to the rear of the house.
6. Skylights with flat profiles may be installed on the rear of the property.
7. Utility equipment, such as television antennae, air conditioners, solar collectors and other mechanical units should be restricted to the rear of the property or on portions of the roof that are not visible from a public way. If no other placement is possible, air conditioning and other cooling units on street facades should be of the slim-line type or set flush with the surface of the building and painted the same color as the window trim.

C. Windows and Doors

1. Retain original and later important door and window openings where they exist. Do not enlarge or reduce door and window openings for the purpose of fitting stock window sash or doors, or air conditioners.
2. Whenever possible, repair and retain original or later important window elements such as sash, lintels, sill, architraves, glass, shutters and other decorative elements and hardware. When replacement of materials or elements is necessary, it should be based on physical or documentary evidence. If aluminum windows must be installed, select a baked finish that matches as closely as possible the color of the existing trim. Investigate weather-stripping and storm windows with a baked enamel finish as an alternative to the replacement of historic sash.

D. Porches, steps, trim and other exterior architectural elements

1. Retain and repair porches and steps that are original or later important features, including such items as railings, balusters, columns, posts, brackets, roofs, ornamental ironwork and other important decorative items. If new pieces are needed, they should match as closely as possible the style, shape, scale and materials of the old. Avoid replacing wood posts and railings with metal ones, or wood porch decks with concrete.
2. Fire escapes are very conspicuous features and, as a rule, should only be placed on the rear of the building, or where they are least visible from a public way. If installation on the street or side façade cannot be avoided, fire escapes should be designed and constructed with the same attention demanded by other major alterations and repairs, and are subject to the review and approval of the Commission.

E. New additions

1. New additions should not disrupt the essential form and integrity of the property and should be compatible in size, scale, material and character of the property and its environment. Where possible, new additions should be confined to the rear of the house.
2. It is not the intent of these guidelines to limit new additions to faithful copies of earlier buildings. New designs may also evoke, without copying, the architecture of the property to which they are being added, through careful attention to height, bulk, materials, window size, and type and location, and detail. A building should not, however, be altered to an appearance that predates its construction.
3. New additions or alterations should be done in a way that, if they were to be removed in the future, the basic form and integrity of the historic property would remain intact.

F. Penthouses and other rooftop additions

1. The objective of preserving the integrity of the original or later important roof shape shall provide the basic criteria in judging whether a penthouse can be added to a roof. The overall height of the building, the prominence of the existing roof form, and the visibility of the proposed addition from a public way shall govern whether a proposed penthouse will be approved.

2. Minimizing or eliminating the visual impact of the penthouse is the general objective, and the following guidelines shall be followed:
 - a. A location should be selected where the penthouse is not visible from a public way or adjacent buildings; setbacks should be used.
 - b. The overall height or other dimensions will be restricted in such a way so that the new penthouse addition cannot be seen from a public way.
 - c. The exterior treatment should relate to the materials, color and texture of the building or to other materials integral to the period and character of the building.
 - d. Openings in a penthouse should relate to the building in proportion, type and size of those below, wherever visually apparent.

G. Signs, marquees and awnings

1. Signs, marquees and awnings integral to the building ornamentation or architectural detailing shall be retained and repaired where necessary.
2. New signs, marquees and awnings should not detract from the essential form of the building nor obscure its architectural features.
3. New signs, marquees and awnings should be of a size, material, shape and color with the building and its current use, and should also be consistent with other signs and buildings along the street.
4. Signs, marquees and awnings applied to the face of a building should be attached in such a way that they can be removed at a later date without damaging the material to which they are fastened.
5. All signs added to the building should be part of a single signage system, or reflect a design concept appropriate to the specific features of the original architecture.
6. Lighting of signs will be evaluated for the specific use intended, but generally, illumination of a sign should not dominate the illumination of the building.

H. Landscape Features and Paving

1. The general intent of this section is to preserve the existing or later essential landscape features that enhance the property.
2. It is recognized that often the environment surrounding the property has a character, scale and street pattern quite different from that existing when the building was constructed. Thus, changes must frequently be made to accommodate the new condition, and the landscape treatment can be seen as a transition feature between the structure and its newer surroundings.
3. The existing landforms of the site should not be altered unless shown to be necessary for maintenance of the structure or site. Additional landforms will only be considered if they will not obscure the exterior of the structure.

4. The original layout and materials of the walks, steps and paved areas should be maintained if significant grade changes constitute an important feature of the structure or site. Consideration will be given to alterations if it can be shown that improved site circulation is necessary and that the alterations will accomplish this without altering the integrity of the structure.

I. Removal of Later Additions and Alterations

1. Each property will be separately studied to determine if later additions and alterations can, or should be removed. It is not possible to provide a single general guideline.
2. Factors that will be considered include:
 - a. compatibility with the original property's integrity in scale, materials and character;
 - b. historic association with the property; and
 - c. quality in the design and execution of the addition.

J. Demolition

1. Demolition of part or all of a structure is considered to be an alteration to the exterior and is subject to the review of the Commission.

III. AMENDMENTS TO THE GUIDELINES

1. The Commission reserves the right to amend these guidelines at any time and from time to time as they deem appropriate, by a majority vote of a legally constituted quorum of the Commission.

IV. SEVERABILITY

1. If any section of the guidelines is deemed to be invalid, illegal, or unconstitutional, that section shall be severed from the text, and the remaining sections of these guidelines shall continue to be in full force and effect.